



Executive Summary

Introduction

Rockville's Pike: Envision a Great Place establishes a vision for how Rockville's portion of the Rockville Pike corridor can be transformed from a non-distinctive suburban retail strip into an attractive and vibrant location for living, working and shopping. The plan represents an update to the Rockville Pike Corridor Neighborhood Plan, which was adopted into the City's Master Plan in 1989.

The purpose of the plan is to communicate the City's vision for Rockville Pike, proactively, rather than responding reactively to development applications and infrastructure needs. An adopted plan is also necessary to provide direction, policies and strategies so that the City can coordinate and collaborate with public and private organizations to achieve the vision.

Regional projections show that almost 9,000 new residents and 4,500 new jobs are expected in the Plan Area by 2040. This will account for just 40% of Rockville's population growth during that timeframe, and approximately 11% of the employment growth.

The plan is the product of an intensive community planning initiative that has incorporated input from citizens, private and public sector leaders, government agencies, consultants, City staff, and other stakeholders. Extensive outreach and publicity efforts have been made throughout the planning process to maximize public knowledge about, and participation in, development of the plan.

The plan's focus is the creation of a vibrant and comfortable mixed-use environment, supported by strong public amenities and facilities, complemented by a transportation network that will better support pedestrians, drivers, transit riders and bicyclists. It takes advantage of Rockville's position in the broader metropolitan region, but retains distinctive features for Rockville. Implementation of the plan should broaden the Pike's appeal from an auto-oriented

retail strip to a corridor that offers safer transportation choices, varied housing choices and enables the area to remain competitive in a changing retail industry.

The Plan Area

The Plan Area contains approximately 382 acres, on both sides of and including a 1.98-mile portion of Rockville Pike (Maryland State Route 355). It is bounded on the north by Richard Montgomery Drive and on the south by the City's corporate limits, near Bou Avenue. Boundaries on the western side include Wootton Parkway, the Woodmont Country Club and East Jefferson Street. The eastern boundary is the Metrorail right-of-way.

Existing Issues and Challenges

Rockville's Pike: Envision a Great Place addresses key issues and challenges identified by both the public and technical analysis during the planning process.

Transportation and Access

Rockville Pike serves both as a regional "highway" and a local road serving local businesses. This dual function creates multiple conflicts, especially in the outer (right) lanes. The Pike is highly congested at times, with some intersections already exceeding City standards for certain periods of the week. Traffic volume will likely increase as growth continues along the MD 355 corridor and as the area south of Rockville redevelops at high densities.

Pedestrian and bicycle conditions are poor, and often unsafe. Sidewalks are narrow, located uncomfortably close to fast-moving traffic, and frequently separated from businesses by expansive parking lots. There are limited opportunities to safely cross the Pike due to long distances between signalized intersections and inadequate pedestrian signal timing. Strip shopping centers are designed for cars and are not pedestrian-friendly. Bicycle infrastructure is inadequate and there is no safe bicycle route along or near the Pike. Furthermore, the rail line and the highway itself limit travel options, especially east-west connectivity. Though Metro's Red Line runs parallel to and near Rockville Pike (there is one stop in the planning area and another just to the north), pedestrian and bicycle access to both stops is challenging, due to poor sidewalks, challenging road crossings.

Land Use

The predominant land use pattern in the Pike corridor is in the form of individual parcels with single-story buildings occupied by a single use, set far back from the street and surrounded by surface parking lots. This pattern uses a vast amount of land, forces multiple vehicle trips between properties, and contributes to the large total number of car trips.

The Pike remains an important retail destination located in a strong regional economic market with significant long-term growth potential. Enhancing the appearance and function of the Pike corridor is important, especially since new competition will be emerging from large-scale growth and development nearby, such as in the White Flint area.

There are no parks or public open spaces for recreation, social gathering, or outdoor enjoyment.

Traffic congestion and school capacity, as regulated by the City's Adequate Public Facilities standards, are likely to inhibit the continued redevelopment of the Pike if the necessary infrastructure is not provided or standards are not revised.

Corridor Planning Principles

The *Rockville's Pike* public process led to the identification of a set of corridor planning principles that have guided the formulation of this plan. They are:

- A. Livable, desirable environment enhanced by thoughtful urban design
 - 1. Community design and development appropriate to Rockville
 - 2. Mixed uses
 - 3. Inviting conditions for walking and biking
 - 4. Appealing parks and public open spaces for community gathering and activity
 - 5. Environmentally friendly and sustainable
 - 6. Distinctive character for Rockville's portion of the corridor
 - 7. Development that is supported by commensurate growth of infrastructure
- B. Multimodal transportation
 - 1. Smooth and safe vehicular flow
 - 2. Safe and accessible pedestrian and biking infrastructure
 - 3. Access and movement choices for all travel modes that provide connections within the corridor and with surrounding areas
 - 4. Efficient and reliable local and regional public transportation options
 - 5. Easy-to-navigate environment
- C. Economic viability
 - 1. Retention and attraction of local and national retail
 - 2. City support for successful development
 - 3. Financeable infrastructure and fiscally responsible implementation

Plan Policies for Transportation and Land Use

Transportation Policies

The Transportation Policies seek to support both the Transportation and Land Use visions of the plan to make the corridor more sustainable and transit-oriented.

1. Redesign and Reconstruct Rockville Pike as a Multi-Way Boulevard.

The core recommendation of this plan is to redesign and reconstruct Rockville Pike as a multi-way boulevard. It is crucial to meeting the transportation, place-making, and economic goals of the plan and addresses the dual - local and regional- nature of the Pike.

The boulevard design will:

- Separate local and regional trips.
- Create the conditions for a shift in the transportation modal split along the Pike, from a high degree of reliance on the private automobile to more diverse transportation choices.
- Make the Pike safer for pedestrians, cyclists and motorists.
- Integrate the Twinbrook Metro Station into the corridor and make public transit a more attractive option.
- Allow for the possibility of additional high-capacity transit service along the Pike.
- Bring transit, walking, and bicycle users closer to the land uses of the Pike, but protected from the fast-moving traffic on the main lanes.
- Reinforce the role of the corridor as a significant retail center in the region.
- Facilitate the transformation of the corridor into an attractive place by creating a streetscape plan and moving utilities underground.

2. Expand the street network to increase connectivity and movement choice, diffuse traffic congestion, create more frequent and convenient crossing opportunities for pedestrians, and create smaller, more pedestrian-friendly blocks.

3. Establish street classifications that conform to the City's complete streets policy and accommodate all road users.

4. Optimize access to and use of public transit, including Metrorail, local buses, and, potentially, a new rapid transit service along Rockville Pike.

Land Use Policies

Rockville's Pike: Envision a Great Place integrates the transportation policies with a set of land use policies to guide the transformation of the corridor from a nondescript automobile-dominated strip to an attractive, walkable place. The proposed land use policies will:

1. Seek to ensure a comfortable and functional relationship between the public infrastructure and private development. The plan, and the associated development regulations, addresses the relationship between building facades and public infrastructure, the form and mass of buildings in relation to one another, the public spaces formed by the disposition of buildings, and the scale and types of streets and blocks.

2. Bring buildings and land uses up to the sidewalks. Buildings will be constructed adjacent to sidewalks to frame the public realm, structure the environment for pedestrians, and position pedestrians where land uses are located.

3. Regulate building height by location within the Plan Area. Maximum building heights serve walkability and economic development objectives by permitting sufficient mixed use density to create vitality, while responding to community concerns about over-development and maintaining a human scale environment. Different height standards are appropriate for different parts of the Plan Area and depend on the specific characteristics of their locations.

4. Create smaller blocks that are walkable. Reducing the size of existing blocks as part of the redevelopment process creates a more finely-developed street network, increases connectivity and movement choices for all travel modes, and provides increased street frontage for land uses.

5. Provide continuous, wide, pleasant sidewalks. Sidewalks are located immediately next to land uses to encourage inter-site movement. Sidewalks are wide and feature amenities such as street trees, benches, bike racks, and places for outdoor restaurant seating.

6. Provide special enhancements for pedestrians at strategic intersections and on strategically located streets. This plan places emphasis on the treatment of building frontages at strategic intersections to create enlarged pedestrian environments with place-making features.

7. Allow for and support a mix of uses to encourage activity in the daytime and evening, reduce dependency on automobiles, and create a full-service transit-oriented neighborhood around the Twinbrook Metro station.

8. Encourage architecture that has visual interest, but allow for creativity. The plan does not mandate particular architectural styles, but rather encourages massing and building forms that are visually interesting, contribute to energy on the street, and incorporate human scale detailing.

9. Provide parks and public open space. The need for parks and pleasant open spaces exists now and this need will grow as redevelopment happens and the number of people living and working in the Plan Area increases.

10. De-emphasize parking as a predominant land use. This plan locates most parking in structures behind or under buildings, thereby minimizing inactive zones and reducing the visually unappealing effect of large surface lots in front of buildings. The plan also encourages less parking as the area becomes more pedestrian-friendly.

The Importance of Implementing the Plan

Implementing this plan will require strong collaboration and cooperation among the City, Montgomery County, the State of Maryland, the private sector, and other organizations. It will also require a careful evaluation of appropriate funding mechanisms and options, with the understanding that Rockville must work proactively and collaboratively with other entities to fund and build infrastructure. The City will need to revise development regulations that present impediments to full implementation of the plan vision and advocate for components of the plan that are outside of its control.

The action steps are discussed in detail in Chapter 5 of the plan document, and are summarized below:

General Policy Elements

1. Maintain strong regional partnerships

2. Ensure adequate infrastructure and community facilities
3. Advocate for components of the plan that are outside of Rockville's direct control
4. Focus on place-making near the Twinbrook Metro Station early in the life of the plan
5. Develop cost estimates and funding strategies

Implement the Transportation Policies

1. Re-design and reconstruct Rockville Pike as a multi-way boulevard
2. Expand the street network
3. Optimize access to and use of transit
4. Expand Transportation Demand Management (TDM) activities in the corridor
5. Strive to refine methodologies for measuring transportation mode share and addressing congestion management

Implement the Land Use Policies

1. Adopt the Rockville Pike District Code
2. Revise development regulations and standards
3. Make the Pike an inviting, walkable place
4. Acquire parkland

These action steps bring to light the complexity of implementing the plan for the corridor. Implementing this plan in full will require a high level of collaboration and cooperation between the City, other jurisdictions, and the private sector over decades. Certain components will also require appropriate funding mechanisms and commitments. Finally, implementation will require seizing opportunities, overcoming obstacles, and thoughtful timing.

CONCLUSION

The Rockville Pike corridor can be more than a shopping location. It can be a great boulevard that serves both local and regional needs and wants, and can enhance its already central role in the economy of Rockville and Montgomery County. This plan seeks to achieve this vision.